

- 3 -

**In the claims:**

All of the claims standing for examination are reproduced below with appropriate status indications. Claims 1 - 7, and 9 - 13 are amended in this response.

1. (currently amended) A stopper assembly for sealing an opening of a vessel comprising:  
a screw stem body having a tapered head on one end and a threaded extension on the other end;

an elastic ~~element~~ enclosure fitted over a portion of the screw stem body including the tapered head, such that the screw stem body is separated by the plastic enclosure from any contents of the vessel to be sealed;

a retention housing fitted ~~over the body and jacket to the elastic enclosure at the end opposite the tapered head,~~ the retention housing retaining the jacket enclosure from lateral displacement, and having a central opening through which the threaded extension passes there through; and

a turning nut attached to the retention housing and threaded to the extension of the screw stem body on a side opposite the elastic enclosure;

characterized in that a user inserts the stopper assembly into a vessel opening, holds the retention housing stable, and turns the turning nut causing travel of the threaded screw stem body through the retention housing within the elastic enclosure and deformation of the elastic ~~jacket~~ against enclosure by the tapered head, deformation thereof directed radially outward to make peripheral contact with the an inner surface of the opening affecting a seal of thereby sealing the opening.

2. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the elastic jacket enclosure is comprises a rubber sleeve having a flared end and deformation occurs when the tapered surface of the tapered head within the sleeve is forced against the flared portion of the sleeve.

- 4 -

3. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the elastic jacket enclosure is a rubber socket covering the tapered head, the socket having a formed feature of peripheral orientation in the socket wall and deformation occurs when the tapered surface of the tapered head is forced against the formed feature of the socket.

4. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the retention housing is keyed to the threaded portion of the screw stem body using a key held in a key opening on the housing, the key engaging a key slot in the body to prevent rotation of the housing about the body.

5. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the retention housing includes a retention cap and a gripping cup, the cup gripping the inner surface of the retention cap to prevent inter-rotation of the components.

6. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 2 further comprising:

- a gas passageway extending longitudinally through the threaded screw stem body;
- a second threaded portion on the body; and
- a valve stem assembly threaded onto the second threaded portion;

characterized in that gas is inserted into the vessel by way of the valve stem assembly and passageway through the sealed opening to maintain carbonation of liquid held in the vessel.

7. (currently amended) The assembly of claim 2 wherein the retention housing is keyed to the threaded portion of the screw stem body using a key engaging a key slot in the body to prevent rotation of the housing about the body.

8. (original) The assembly of claim 2 wherein the retention housing includes a retention cap and a gripping cup the cup gripping the inner surface of the retention cap to prevent inter-rotation of the components.

- 5 -

9. (currently amended) A method for sealing a vessel opening using a stopper assembly having a threaded screw stem body with a tapered head on one end and a threaded extension on the other end; an elastic jacket enclosure fitted over a portion of the screw stem body including the tapered head, such that the screw stem body is separated by the plastic enclosure from any contents of the vessel to be sealed; a retention housing fitted over the body and jacket to the elastic enclosure at an end opposite the tapered head; and a turning nut attached to the retention housing and threaded to the extension of the screw stem body comprising steps of:

- (a) positioning the stopper assembly into the vessel opening;
- (b) holding the retention housing to stabilize body travel there through; and
- (c) turning the turning nut until the opening is sealed.

10. (currently amended) The method of claim 9 wherein the elastic jacket enclosure is one of a rubber sleeve or a rubber socket.

11. (currently amended) The method of claim 9 wherein in step (a) the vessel opening ~~and~~ is void of threading or lip features.

12. (currently amended) The method of claim 9 wherein in step (b) the retention housing retains the elastic jacket enclosure and functions as a travel bed for the threaded body portion.

13. (currently amended) The method of claim 9 wherein in step (c) the amount of turning of the turning nut is constrained by a stop nut engaged on a second threaded portion of the threaded screw stem body.